



SONDY POPE-ROBERTS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Testimony
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Thank you Chairman Petrowski and committee members for the opportunity to speak on behalf of AB 675, the multifunction school activity bus bill.

This bill was drafted at the request of one of my constituents, Mr. Dan Olsen, owner and Director of Kids Junction in Verona.

Everyday in Wisconsin and nationwide, child care facilities use multifunction school activity busses to transport their students. These vehicles are virtually identical to 'regular' school busses with the exception of their color and lack of a stop arm. They are safer than the commonly used 9 or 15 passenger vans and more economical because they can transport more passengers at once. While these vehicles are allowed to take children on day trips or field trips, Wisconsin statutes do not allow them to transport students to and from school.

Under current law, vehicles that carry 10 or more people (9 passengers + driver) to or from a school must be defined as a school bus. AB 675 simply creates a distinct category of school bus called a "multifunction school activity bus" (MFSAB) which is defined as "a vehicle that is a school bus but that does not transport pupils to or from the pupils' home or school bus stop....and is not required to be painted school bus colors and, when not so painted, is not required to be equipped with flashing red signals, flashing strobe light or a stop signal arm...".

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration adopted the multifunction school activity bus classification because it will make it easier for transportation providers, other than school districts, to provide a safer transportation alternative to the large passenger vans. At least 29 other states already allow child care facilities or after school organizations to use MFSAB's to pick up or drop off students at school.

To keep the bill simple, all licensing requirements for traditional school busses and drivers would be the same for MFSAB's and their drivers, which will also ensure that quality, safe drivers are transporting our children.

This proposal is a simple addition to state statutes that would provide a safer transportation alternative for child care facilities and after school programs.

Dan Olsen
Kids Junction

Kids Junction is a family owned and operated preschool located on the west side of Madison.

We knew from the beginning that quality and integrity would be the foundation of our business and that all of our decisions would be based on these values.

Securing safe transportation was one of our earliest decisions. We knew that vans were an option and the choice most centers make because it is cheaper, but we wanted to see if there were any other options like a small bus.

After some Internet research we found a large, out of state dealer, that sold small white mini busses and it seemed like the perfect fit. They were made to federal bus specifications and were much safer than any van. The cost at the time was about 35k for a new one, so while it was more expensive than a van it was still reasonable.

As Kids Junction continued to grow we needed more transportation so we purchased another white 15 passenger bus and a white 66 passenger bus. It was after these 2 purchases that we were visited by the state patrol and they informed us that there might be a problem with these vehicles being used to pick up kids after school with the way the law was written about 9 passengers maximum being allowed on the bus.

I found it hard to believe that we might not be able to use these safer busses and be forced to sell them and get vans for after school pickup because the busses are obviously much safer, even though they seat more than 9 passengers.

Through some Internet research on the "definition of a school bus" I found the federal ruling by NHTSA for a Multi-Function School Activity Buss and became encouraged that perhaps this ruling could help our situation as well as the whole state of Wisconsin.

I was able to speak with a Sgt. from the state troopers and explain what I found out about MFSAB's and after looking into it he agreed that this would be a good ruling to apply to Wisconsin law and he encouraged me to contact my representatives.

We began this process in December of 2006 and thanks to the hard work of my representatives Sen. Erpenbach and Sindy Pope-Roberts office, whom I have worked closely with, we may get this bill passed and make after school transportation safer for all of Wisconsin's children.

Thank You

